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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 42nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 12 April 2000, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. SIMKHADA (Nepal)
later: Mr. IBRAHIM (The Sudan)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS (agenda item 10) (continued)
(E/CN.4/2000/52 and Add.1)

Special debate on poverty and the enjoyment of human rights (continued)

1. Mr. HUSSAIN (Observer for Iraq) said that his delegation welcomed the fact that the special debate was being held. Although Iraq was a rich country with the potential to enable its people to live in dignity, it had been hit hard by poverty owing to the economic embargo imposed by the Security Council, which had completely paralysed the exercise of the right to development. His delegation requested the Commission to make an in-depth study of the devastating impact of the embargo on the exercise of essential human rights such as the right to life, education, food and health, and to state its position clearly.¹
2. Ms. STEFFEN (Canada) said that poverty did not simply mean a shortage of economic resources. It meant the inability to change one's life in order to solve one's problems and the inability to participate fully in social life. People living in extreme poverty were liable to be marginalized and discriminated against. The situation of women and girls required special attention. For many years, development programmes had stressed non-discrimination, participation, good governance and the primacy of the rule of law, all of which depended squarely on the effectiveness of the aid that was made available. Canada's official development assistance (ODA) aimed to promote sustainable development, the primary objective being to reduce poverty. Canada was an active participant in the initiative to alleviate the debt burden of the most heavily indebted countries.
3. Mr. TOBIN (United Kingdom) said that specific measures needed to be taken to reduce poverty in developing countries. Massive investment in the infrastructures of those countries was required (water supply, sanitation, health care, electricity, transport, communications and education) in order to create favourable conditions for economic growth. The donor community should coordinate efforts to address that need and cooperate with businesses and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The development of an efficient private sector and good governance were essential prerequisites.
4. Ms. ABOULNAGA (Observer for Egypt), noting that poverty was the main obstacle to development, said that the aim of the recent summit in Cairo attended by African and European countries had been to fill the gaps in international efforts to help developing countries, especially in Africa. Although half the world's population managed to survive on \$2 a day, ODA was dwindling and the objectives approved at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen had not been met. The policies pursued by developing countries in their attempts to reduce poverty had been thwarted by the closure of markets in developed countries and the destabilization of the system of international trade. In line with the Washington consensus, international organizations should pursue coherent policies to help developing countries cope with their debts and weather financial crises.
5. Mr. HILL (Observer for New Zealand) said that only a coherent policy and concerted efforts would provide the means to eliminate extreme poverty, which was one of the greatest

challenges currently facing the international community. The international community needed to utilize all its capacity, experience and resources to that end. It was a question of respect for human rights and social justice. New Zealand stood ready to cooperate in that endeavour, highlighting the importance of good governance and the equitable distribution of ODA.

6. Mr. TANDAR (Observer for Afghanistan) said that he regretted two shortcomings in the international legal order concerning poverty. First, there was no provision for punishing complicity in cases of corruption. When the existence of illegal bank accounts containing substantial sums was revealed, sometimes equivalent to the size of a national budget, the guilty party escaped punishment. Second, there was no mechanism to penalize enterprises which took the national resources of poor countries hostage by encouraging and financing civil wars. Such omissions needed to be rectified.

7. Mr. CHATTY (Tunisia) said that it was important to study the objective causes, both internal and especially external, which led to poverty and impeded development and to consider poverty in the setting of the right to development. Given that specific measures were needed to realize the right to development, the Tunisian Government had set up a national solidarity fund and a national solidarity bank which had been conspicuously successful in reducing poverty in Tunisia. The Commission might wish to take note of the innovative and interesting idea put forward by the President of Tunisia, who had proposed the establishment of a worldwide fund for solidarity and poverty reduction.

8. Mr. DESPOUY (Argentina) said that, since the publication of the first report on extreme poverty 14 years before, thinking on the issue had evolved considerably. There was now a genuine awareness in the Commission of the connection between extreme poverty and human rights and consensus on the need for an open debate on the subject. Another important realization was that poverty was not just an economic issue, but a whole nexus of inter-related insecurities causing a vicious downward spiral and impacting directly on human rights. In order to escape the fatalism and vicious circle of poverty, it was essential to help people and work alongside them. Giving people back the rights which had been taken away from them, as in the case of the victims of apartheid, would promote human fellowship, democracy, and a rebirth of the human spirit.

9. Mr. OYARCE (Chile) said that the fight against extreme poverty was an important component in promoting human rights; the United Nations system should therefore adopt a comprehensive approach to the issue which took account of all aspects of development. The forthcoming review of the World Summit on Social Development would provide an opportunity to define national and international strategies to counter poverty and social exclusion.

10. Mr. KOTHARI (Habitat International Coalition) said that one of the points which the Commission should impress upon States was the need to redirect their existing resources towards the realization of development objectives. Resources channelled along such lines would be topped up by targeted support in the form of international cooperation, as envisaged under articles 2 and 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Another point which had barely been touched upon was the need to establish a national vulnerability index that took equal account of the quantifiable and unquantifiable elements of poverty.

11. Mr. RAMOS-HORTA (Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace) said that he was grateful to all Governments, United Nations agencies and NGOs which over the years had focused attention on the situation in East Timor and to all those countries which had come to East Timor's rescue when it had been threatened with extinction. The best test of Timorese gratitude would be specific measures to reconstruct the country.

12. The destruction of East Timor had been systematically planned. Buildings had been burned down and dynamited in urban and rural areas alike. Practically every household had been looted. Thousands of farm animals had been killed. Hundreds of innocent people had been killed in the space of a few days and 250,000 people had been abducted. Yet the Timorese harboured no hatred against their tormentors. They sympathized with Indonesia in the light of its considerable economic, social and political problems and also admired its recent progress towards democracy. The exchange of visits between the Presidents of the two countries just two months after the violence of September 1999 signalled their common desire to rebuild relations. Much remained to be done, but the Indonesian authorities had made commendable efforts to bring to justice those responsible for war crimes in East Timor. For the sake of justice and democracy, those directly or indirectly responsible for acts of torture, murder and rape should not go unpunished.

13. Reconstruction had begun in East Timor, but even the most basic services were lacking. The international community had pledged contributions of more than \$1.2 billion. The United Nations had full executive and legislative authority; the World Bank was supervising the reconstruction effort; and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was helping the East Timorese to develop a system for managing the economy. East Timorese nationals were involved in all central and local decision-making through the National Consultative Council. The border situation had stabilized. A civilian police force and a United Nations police force were being built up. A new judicial system had been established. Refugees were gradually returning home. The health-care and food situation remained a cause for concern, but United Nations agencies and humanitarian associations were feeding and assisting people who had lost everything. In order to ensure further progress, donor countries should show generosity at their scheduled meetings in Lisbon in June and Okinawa in July, where the question of East Timor would be on the agenda.

14. Poverty was connected with human rights. Billions of people were living in extreme poverty, which was not only a cause of great personal suffering, but also a threat to regional and international peace and security. Developing countries needed to slash their military budgets and divert funds to education, health care and poverty reduction. Donor countries and international agencies should increase development assistance to countries that reduced their defence budgets. Arms-producing countries should scale down weapons exports to developing countries and international financial institutions should share in efforts to secure peace and reduce poverty. The debts of the least developed countries (LDCs) should be cancelled and a moratorium declared on the debt repayments of countries which had significantly reduced their defence budget and allocated increased resources to education and health care.

15. East Timor had secured its freedom at the cost of many lives. If, in the coming years, it managed to eliminate illiteracy, poverty and malaria; provide all its citizens with clean water and electricity; ensure that everyone enjoyed freedom of expression; and replace weapons with

computers, schools and health centres, those sacrifices would not have been in vain. The East Timorese authorities had asked the High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide technical assistance in respect of the principal international human rights instruments so that the Parliament could proceed to ratify them expeditiously and thus help to promote a human rights culture through workshops and seminars.

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (agenda item 13) (*continued*) (E/CN.4/2000/69-72, 73 and Add.1-3, 74, 75 and 128; E/CN.4/2000/NGO/21, 35, 57, 59, 82, 88, 127 and 142; CRC/C/84, 87 and 90)

16. Mr. AMAT FORÉS (Cuba) said that, on 22 November 1999, unbeknown to his father, six-year-old Elián González, his mother and a dozen adults had attempted to cross the Florida strait. Their craft had sunk off the Florida coast and, on 25 November, Elián had been rescued by two fishermen. Distraught at his son's disappearance, Elián's father had contacted distant relatives living in Florida. Some of the relatives had subsequently learned of the boy's rescue and asked the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service to be allowed to care for him. Their request had been granted and, shortly afterwards, one of the boy's great-uncles had been made temporary guardian. The father had lost no time in informing the relatives that he would seek his son's return to Cuba. But, for over four months, the boy had been separated from his accustomed surroundings, in which he had been perfectly happy. He had been cruelly deprived of his father's love and the affection of his family. Barely two days after Elián's rescue, a Miami- and Washington-based terrorist organization called Fundación Nacional Cubano-Americana had started to exploit the harrowing case for political ends.

17. The United States federal judicial authorities had recently confirmed that the Justice Department (and its subordinate agency, the Immigration and Naturalization Service) had sole jurisdiction over the case, and that validated the latter agency's decision that the child should be returned to Cuba. The reaction of Miami's counter-revolutionary mafia had been instantaneous: calls for civil disobedience, threats of riots and reckless statements by politicians from the south of Florida. The Floridan great-uncle had persisted in his refusal to hand the boy over to his father voluntarily, thereby completely disregarding the demands of the United States authorities and public opinion in Cuba, the United States and the rest of the world. The United States thus gave the impression of being unable to enforce the law in its own territory while simultaneously enacting laws for application beyond its borders. The case was both a legal and moral issue, since it involved a child's emotional stability. It was a complete and utter travesty of the law.

18. Elián had been manipulated by the media and subjected to pressure designed to isolate him emotionally from his accustomed surroundings and the affection of his immediate family. International law, particularly human rights law, was crystal clear. According to article 1 of The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, States parties were obliged to ensure the return of minors who had been unlawfully removed or restrained in any contracting party. That provision was fully in accordance with article 9, paragraph 1; article 11, paragraph 1; and article 35 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been ratified by almost the entire international community except the United States. The preamble to that Convention stated that all children should grow up in a family environment. The same principle was clearly stated in the Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993. Furthermore, article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stressed the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and

family relations. Under article 9, paragraph 1, States parties undertook to ensure that children should not be separated from their parents against their will. It was therefore entirely obvious that the Commission on Human Rights should take a close interest in the case.

19. Quite apart from the emotion caused by the fate of an abducted child, the central issue in Elián's case was to determine whether the rules of law and humanitarian principles could be flouted. International rules were applicable to all countries and, once freely accepted, should be implemented by all States irrespective of their military and economic might. Were children from the South entitled fully to develop their personality in their native surroundings? A child should not have to live in a Northern country to realize his or her full potential as an individual and member of society. The Miami mafia was trying to convince Americans that the contrary was true, but their claims were sounding increasingly hollow.

20. Mr. RODRÍGUEZ CEDEÑO (Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, said that the new draft resolution on the rights of the child which the Group intended to introduce did not differ substantively from earlier resolutions on the same topic. The changes had mostly to do with structure and were designed to give the resolution a distinctive identity. Hence the preamble to each section had been deleted and the general preamble had been strengthened. Each new section contained specific initiatives designed to ensure better protection and promotion of the rights of the child. The resolution should facilitate the work of the key players, namely, United Nations agencies, Governments and NGOs.

21. Given the increasing number of violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant instruments (illegal adoptions, absconding parents, abductions, domestic and social violence, neglect and abuse), the new substantive provisions stressed the importance of the family as the natural environment enabling a child to develop fully. They dealt with the child's right to identity and the right to be registered and cared for by his or her parents. A short section would deal with violence against children. No mention had been made of the adoption of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, or on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, which would be the subject of a separate resolution.

22. The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States was open to all suggestions and counted on the support of all members of the Commission to produce a resolution that would encourage new thinking on the subject. The year 2000 was a milestone in the protection of the rights of the child firstly, because 2 September was the tenth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and, secondly, because the two draft optional protocols referred to above had been adopted by the respective working groups. Although the texts were the result of a compromise, they nevertheless represented a notable advance in terms of respecting the best interests of the child, which was the fundamental principle enshrined in the Convention. The greater the number of States which adopted the protocol, the more secure those interests would be.

23. The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States urged all States parties to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

24. Ms. SCHELLONGOVA (Czech Republic) said that her Government wished to see the Convention on the Rights of the Child universally ratified and meaningfully applied during the current year, the tenth anniversary of its entry into force. Monitoring of implementation was especially important and, although the Czech Republic commended the efforts of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, it was nevertheless concerned about the negative impact of delays in its work. Accordingly, it would be a good idea to enlarge the membership of the Committee, which was why the Czech Parliament had approved the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention in November 1999.

25. As to child labour, the Czech Republic had endorsed the adoption of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) and welcomed in particular the explicit reference to the recruitment of children for use in armed conflict (art. 3 of the Convention). The Czech Government was currently discussing the Convention and hoped to ratify it before the end of the year.

26. The use of children in armed conflicts was a major concern of the Czech Republic. Her Government was pleased that one of the principal shortcomings of the Convention on the Rights of the Child would soon be partially remedied through the adoption of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Children had no place on the battlefield and the involvement of persons under 18 years of age was prohibited by international law. An amendment to the Czech Military Service Act raising the minimum age for voluntary enrolment in the armed forces to 18 had entered into force in December 1999. Her Government continued to appreciate the work of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and welcomed the adoption of the relevant Optional Protocol. The Czech Republic paid tribute to the efforts of the many NGOs working in the field of children's rights and would cooperate with them and all interested Governments in order to enhance the protection of children's rights worldwide.

27. Mr. HU Kang-ai (Republic of Korea) welcomed the adoption of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been made possible by a general willingness to compromise. The Optional Protocols were important for two reasons. First, they laid down effective international norms in the areas which posed the greatest threat to children, namely, armed conflicts, sexual abuse and labour exploitation. Second, they reflected the will of the international community to protect children and prosecute abusers, including non-governmental entities. The next step was the development of tools to operationalize those norms. One such tool would certainly be the rapid entry into force of the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention, which only 66 States had accepted. Considering that the two new Optional Protocols could only increase the burdens on the Committee on the Rights of the Child, it was desirable that more countries should sign up to the amendment.

28. Almost a decade after the entry into force of the Convention and the World Summit for Children, tangible improvements had occurred in the field of children's rights. The special session of the General Assembly scheduled for September 2001 would provide an opportunity to review the progress that had been made and identify the factors that had either inhibited or encouraged positive developments. His delegation intended to contribute to the preparations for the session and hoped that it would yield tangible results.

29. Different regions sometimes had different priorities as far as efforts to protect children were concerned. In East Asia, great efforts had been made to eliminate one of the most intolerable aspects of child exploitation, namely, trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children. Two regional meetings had been held to address the issue, in Bangkok from 26 to 28 January and Manila from 29 to 31 March. They had enabled the Governments concerned to learn about the actual situation in the region. His delegation was confident that such efforts would help to eliminate trafficking of children.

30. Mr. HUSSAIN (Observer for Iraq) said that the Iraqi Government attached particular importance to the rights of children, the future of humanity, and had prioritized development programmes in the field of education and health care. The measures had yielded beneficial results for children and Iraq had almost drawn level with developed countries in that regard. His Government had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994 and had set up a committee to develop strategies to assist children.

31. However, the embargo that had been imposed on Iraq since 1990 had had a very negative impact on the entire population and on children in particular. According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the infant mortality rate among children under five had jumped to 60 per 1,000 between 1994 and 1999 and to 74 per 1,000 between 1994 and 1998 in the over-five age group. One million children were malnourished and, according to the latest report by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), diarrhoea was apparently the number-one cause of death. Many children were denied access to health care and over 110,000 children had not attended school in 1999. Many of them were suffering the consequences of the unjustly imposed embargo and had been living in fear since the start of the British and American bombing campaigns. Furthermore, the use of depleted uranium by the British and Americans had led to an increase in the number of cancers and childhood diseases. Experts believed that there would also be long-term environmental consequences.

32. The Iraqi Government therefore requested the Commission to intervene in order to stop the sufferings of Iraqi children and to request the lifting of the unjust embargo.

33. Ms. DURÁN (Venezuela) said that the Venezuelan Government had put special emphasis on children in implementing social policies in the fields of education, health care and nutrition. It had also stressed the importance of protecting children in difficulty. Venezuela had therefore been actively involved in the working groups that had drawn up the two Optional Protocols. By adopting the two Protocols, the international community would strengthen its efforts in support of children. The sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the involvement of children in armed conflicts were all practices that harmed the mental and physical health of children, demeaned them and ran counter to the spirit and letter of the Convention.

34. The Comprehensive Safeguards (Children and Adolescents) Institutional Act had entered into force in Venezuela on 1 April 2000. The Act was part of a general effort to bring national legislation into line with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Considered by UNICEF as an extremely progressive instrument in the field of children's rights, the Act was one of a number of initiatives designed to improve the social, educational and legal situation of Venezuelan children. It established the right of the child to physical integrity and

protection against all forms of violence and sexual exploitation and prescribed custodial sentences for persons who passed children to third parties in exchange for money. The age of compulsory military service had been legally fixed at 18.

35. All measures to help children and adolescents should take account of the best interests of the child. The protection of children was primarily the responsibility of the family, although the State and the international community also had a role to play.

36. Ms. GEELS (Observer for New Zealand) said that, despite the progress that had been made since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there was a need to develop new standards to strengthen the protection of children in two areas. The provisions of the Convention concerning children in armed conflicts and the sale of children, including their sexual exploitation, were inadequate. New Zealand therefore welcomed the two draft Optional Protocols to the Convention that dealt with those issues.

37. The conclusion of negotiations on the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts was a significant milestone and the working group should be commended on the manner in which it had carried out its work. By placing emphasis on the demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers, the Protocol had signalled the need for practical action. The recent appointment of Child Protection Advisers in the United Nations peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo was a welcome development in that regard. The Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was a remarkable compromise given the differences that had existed between delegations at the outset. New Zealand urged States to support the adoption of the Protocols by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. It hoped that the two instruments would be opened for signature before the end of the year and encouraged all States to ratify them.

38. Agreements to adopt instruments were not enough to safeguard and protect children's rights; such instruments also had to be implemented. New Zealand acknowledged the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and UNICEF in that regard. Her Government also welcomed the recent adoption of the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), which it intended to ratify.

39. In connection with the five-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action, New Zealand urged States to attach special importance to the needs of the girl child. Her delegation noted that the preparatory process for follow-up to the World Summit for Children was already under way and hoped that it would honestly evaluate the status of the world's children.

40. Ms. BU FIGUEROA (Observer for Honduras) said that her Government had taken practical action to ensure the effective enjoyment of children's rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child had been the starting point for a range of measures, including the adoption of the Children's and Youth Code in 1996. Honduras had endeavoured to incorporate the provisions of the Convention into its legislation, as demonstrated by the reform of the Penal Code and the recent adoption of a new Code of Criminal Procedure.

41. Aware that the allocation of resources at national level did not satisfactorily serve the best interests of the child, the Honduran Government had established institutions such as the Social Investment Fund, which implemented poverty-reduction programmes, the Family Benefits Programme, which was targeted at mothers and children, provided that the latter were attending school and the Honduran Childhood and Family Institute, whose remit was to oversee implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

42. The establishment of a special Procurator-General's Office for children and the programmes of the Ministry of Education had reduced the number of corporal punishments inflicted on children. The Honduran Government had also elaborated a "healthy schools" project which aimed to create a favourable school, family and community environment for children. A rehabilitation and social resettlement programme had been implemented for juvenile delinquents. And the practice of detaining minors together with adults had been discontinued.

43. Public and private bodies working with young people and human rights protection organizations should pool their efforts to facilitate the integration of young people into society, guarantee their access to education and ensure that they enjoyed protection. The Honduran Government had established an Inter-institutional Commission to phase out child labour, which brought together a number of representative institutions from the public and private sectors. It was ready to accede to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

44. Ms. TAHERI (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran) said that priority should be given to protecting and promoting the rights of the child. Children, the future of society, should discover human rights for themselves and how to put them into practice. Schools were not the only place for such a discovery; it was vital that children should grow up in a healthy and sound environment and Governments, international organizations and NGOs all had a responsibility to create such an environment.

45. The UNICEF report entitled The State of the World's Children 2000 contained encouraging statistics. It showed that significant progress had been made since 1990 in terms of giving minors access to safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, food, education and immunization. However, progress had been too slow and many serious problems remained. At least 600 million children were currently living in poverty and hundreds of thousands were exposed to famine. It was estimated that 55 million children aged between 5 and 11 were working in hazardous conditions. Armed conflicts had taken the lives of 2 million children and injured another 6 million in the last 10 years. Such statistics were the result, *inter alia*, of the widening gap between developed and developing countries, a lack of adequate resources, the sharp decline in ODA and the debt burden of the developing countries.

46. The two draft Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts and the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography represented a major step forward. Despite certain shortcomings, the two instruments should make possible a strengthening of cooperation between Governments and the members of civil society.

47. The Iranian Government had taken a number of measures to protect the rights of children during the last two decades. It had allocated over 20 per cent of the annual national budget to health care, education, social security and other services targeted at children; established a primary health-care system and opened primary and secondary schools throughout the country; considerably increased the number of publications about children; and lowered the voting age in parliamentary and presidential elections to 16.

48. Ms. SCHONMANN (Observer for Israel) said that, in a landmark decision of October 1999, the Israeli Supreme Court had set a national and international precedent by imposing tort damages on a parent who had neglected children in his care. Another further important ruling in January 2000 had condemned in absolute terms the use of corporal punishment as a means of imposing discipline and raising children. That ruling, the reflection of a growing awareness in Israel, clearly showed that child abuse was unlawful as well as being immoral. It was a milestone in a long-running campaign against domestic violence and child abuse in particular, and was sequel to an earlier ruling that prohibited the use of physical punishment by teachers and other care-givers.

49. Following Israel's accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, the Israeli Parliament had adopted a basic law on human dignity and liberty which ensured that the rights of the child were constitutionally protected. There had been a steady increase in the number of judicial decisions based on the principles embodied in the Convention and the imposition of harsher penalties for violations of children's rights. Furthermore, the Civil Wrongs Ordinance would shortly be amended with a view to repealing a provision that provided teachers and parents with a defence against tort liability for the use of corporal punishment as a means of discipline and education.

50. Israel was undertaking wide-ranging reforms in the field of children's rights. In 1997, a special committee had been appointed to review existing legislation in the light of the Convention with a view to recommending appropriate amendments. In addition, the Israeli Parliament had recently adopted a law setting up commissions on the status of the child in every municipality. Child representatives would also sit on the commissions. Awareness-raising campaigns in the media and schools were currently in preparation.

51. Many obstacles remained in the fight against child abuse. Israel therefore urged all States and NGOs to vigorously condemn all forms of corporal punishment which were inflicted on children and which were an affront to human dignity.

52. Ms. LADAME (International Committee of the Red Cross) welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts, especially the provisions prohibiting recruitment into armed forces and participation in armed conflicts of children under 18, and noted with satisfaction the willingness of States to regulate the behaviour of non-governmental entities.

53. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had nevertheless found some shortcomings in the Optional Protocol. The obligation on States to prevent children from taking part in hostilities should also have included indirect participation, which was often just as dangerous. The provisions concerning compulsory recruitment were compromised by the fact

that voluntary enlistment under the age of 18 was still permitted. It was after all difficult to determine whether a child had or had not been recruited voluntarily. Furthermore, the dispensation given to military schools threatened to weaken the scope of the Optional Protocol. ICRC welcomed States' willingness to control the behaviour of non-governmental entities, but believed that the relevant provision was inadequate insofar as it was a moral and not a legal obligation in the eyes of international law. Moreover, it was unlikely that non-governmental entities would feel bound by a legal rule different from the one imposed on States.

54. ICRC's mandate applied not only to child soldiers, but to all victims of armed conflicts, including children. It offered special assistance to children under each of its programmes by endeavouring to meet their specific needs. Accordingly, every initiative included a component dealing with the maintenance and restoration of family ties, and considerable emphasis was placed on children's health and safety. ICRC was also active in freeing detained children and reuniting them with their families. Finally, it registered unaccompanied children and monitored them until their cases had been resolved.

55. ICRC intended to pursue its cooperation with other field-based organizations and with Governments. Together with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, it would continue to improve the situation of children in armed conflicts, in line with the plan of action adopted at the 27th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement had also adopted a plan of action focusing on child victims of armed conflicts which envisaged practical steps to rehabilitate and reintegrate children.

56. Mr. BERTELLO (Observer for the Holy See) said that his delegation had taken note of the adoption of the two draft Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and welcomed the willingness shown by various delegations to reach a compromise and their efforts in that direction.

57. The Holy See would have preferred the draft Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts to have established 18 years as the minimum age both for compulsory and for voluntary enlistment in armed forces. It was sometimes difficult to tell whether such a decision by a child was genuinely voluntary and free. Children might wish to enlist to demonstrate their strength and maturity. Alternatively, they might enrol as a result of peer pressure, be sucked into the armed forces by the surrounding culture of violence, or join out of a desire to avenge deaths in their family. Other problems were the low level of education among child recruits, whose schooling had been interrupted, and the fact that their involvement in hostilities was dependent on the economic, social and cultural situation of their family and community. The adoption of the new Optional Protocol should therefore go hand in hand with effective preventive work, for example, policies that took account of the child's personality and met his needs and those of his family or the community in which he lived.

58. The campaign against the sexual exploitation of children necessitated the intervention and cooperation of all parties involved in the upbringing of young people: the family, educational and social institutions and religious communities. A special responsibility devolved on the civil authorities, which needed to ensure that young people were adequately integrated both socially and economically. The Holy See stressed the importance of drawing up and

putting into effect a blueprint for society based on respect for and protection of the human being. The erosion of family and community values and the exaltation of a lifestyle in which money was considered the supreme value had possibly contributed to the magnitude of the problem. Even allowing for the fact that its provisions were not exhaustive, the adoption of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was still an important step forward in proscribing crimes against children.

59. Ms NOGUCHI (International Labour Organization) said that ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), which had been adopted unanimously the previous July, aimed to protect tens of millions of children from forcible recruitment into armed forces, prostitution, pornography, slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and hazardous work. The ILO had therefore taken a keen interest and participated as an observer in the elaboration of the two draft Optional Protocols to the Convention.

60. The ILO was grateful to the United Nations and its human rights protection bodies for their interest in Convention No. 182 and especially to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which had encouraged the States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to ratify the new ILO convention. Thanks to that support and increased international awareness of the problem of child labour, States had been quick to ratify the new instrument, which was due to take effect in November 2000, thereby supplementing Convention No. 138, which called for the effective abolition of all forms of child labour. The large number of ratifications indicated that over half the member States of the ILO were committed to that goal. The two Conventions were regarded as "core instruments" in that they articulated basic principles and rights in the workplace which had been the subject of a solemn declaration adopted at the International Labour Conference in June 1998.

61. By virtue of their membership of the ILO, States had an obligation to promote and pursue the effective abolition of child labour, focusing their attention on the most blatant manifestations. To ensure that the Conventions prohibiting child labour were observed in practice, worldwide measures needed to be taken. One innovative feature of the new Convention was its appeal for international cooperation and assistance. The ILO was helping member States to combat child labour in the field through specific projects forming part of its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC).

62. Convention No. 182 covered all persons aged under 18 in line with the definition of the child contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It was the ILO's hope that the two Optional Protocols and Convention No. 182 would complement and reinforce each other.

63. Ms. SANTOS PAIS (United Nations Children's Fund) said that, overall, statements made in the Commission on Human Rights indicated the gap between legal rules and the harsh reality faced by millions of people, particularly children. Accordingly, UNICEF was convinced that children's rights should be mainstreamed throughout the Commission's work.

64. UNICEF welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the process leading up to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, regarding it as another opportunity to focus the debate on children's rights. Children should be a bridge between cultures, religions and races, and a means of building societies that were more

tolerant and understanding towards one another. The general discussion planned by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on violence against children would also provide an opportunity to associate major human rights mechanisms with the movement for children's rights. UNICEF hoped that the discussion would mark the beginning of a more institutionalized dialogue between the mechanisms of the Commission, other relevant partners and UNICEF.

65. Important steps had been taken in 1999 to strengthen the protection of children's rights. In the area of juvenile justice, for example, UNICEF had organized an international meeting to enhance cooperation on follow-up to the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, especially with regard to law reform, capacity-building and institutional development. UNICEF was also encouraged by the fruitful working relationship it had developed with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children and the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Lessons learned from their mandates would pave the way for the consideration of new standards with regard to the protection of children. UNICEF welcomed the completion of the work on the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and hoped that they would be adopted at the forthcoming session of the General Assembly, whereupon UNICEF would actively press for their ratification and future implementation. It hoped that, on the basis of the Convention, States would endeavour to guarantee the highest level of protection for children at all times. In that spirit, UNICEF urged State parties intending to ratify the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts to issue a declaration establishing 18 as the minimum age for recruitment into armed forces. Moreover, States ratifying the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child pornography and child prostitution should express their commitment to be guided by the best interests of the child in enforcing it effectively.

66. A special session of the General Assembly was due to be held in 2001 to review the progress achieved since the World Summit for Children. The preparation for the special session should bring together all relevant actors. But the groundswell in favour of children should go beyond a formal preparatory process. It should involve an alliance of all stakeholders, thereby helping to ensure that the best interests of the child were kept at the heart of the debate. The decisive support of the Commission in that process was crucial and would indicate that the international community was prepared to put children in the forefront of its agenda.

67. Mr. NGOUBEYOU (Observer for Cameroon) said that the signature and ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by a significant number of States, including Cameroon, was an encouraging indicator of the international community's interest in children, one of the most vulnerable groups in society and the future of humanity.

68. Since children were the first innocent victims of war, Cameroon welcomed the final version of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts and strongly endorsed the idea of raising the minimum age for the enlistment of children into armed forces. His Government thanked Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children, for his excellent work in apprising the international community of the urgent need for vigorous action in order to spare children the consequences of adult folly. As part of the campaign against the sale of children for sexual purposes, prostitution and pornography, appropriate measures were also called for to protect girls, in particular, against sexual abuse; to strengthen national laws against the worst forms of child labour, paedophilia and

child pornography; to establish an electronic surveillance network to prevent the improper use of the Internet for pornographic purposes; and to involve the family, civil society and the media in protecting the rights of the child.

69. Because education played a crucial role in the implementation of the basic rights of children, Cameroon fully endorsed the conclusions in the report by Ms. Tomasevski, the Special Rapporteur on the right to education (E/CN.4/2000/6 and Add.1 and 2). In Cameroon, education occupied a key position in the fight against the vicious circle of ignorance, illiteracy, idleness and delinquency. The President of the Republic had recently resolved that primary education, hitherto compulsory, should also be free of charge for all children, including refugee children, with effect from September 2000. Moreover, the competent national authorities were endeavouring to create conditions to promote equal opportunities for girls and boys.

70. His delegation particularly welcomed UNICEF's efforts to help children and was grateful for its assistance in organizing the mini-summit of African children in Yaoundé in 1996 and children's parliamentary sessions in 1998 and 1999. The latter had been attended by children from all social backgrounds, who had questioned Government ministers on various issues affecting the future of young people. The tragic fate of children who lived or worked in the streets, where they were exposed to delinquency or drug addiction, merited special attention. The Cameroonian Government was continuing to pursue comprehensive solutions to their problems of integration and survival. The assistance of the international community was required to support the Government's practical efforts and to put into effect projects and initiatives designed to improve the situation of particularly vulnerable groups.

71. Mr. GASPERONI (Observer for San Marino) stressed the need for all Member States of the United Nations to accede without reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to implement its provisions in full. In order to mark the tenth anniversary of the Convention's entry into force, the Government of San Marino had decided to issue four postage stamps which represented the basic principles of the Convention and would be made available to the most prestigious philatelic clubs in the world and to the general public. The proceeds from the sale of the stamps would be devoted entirely to children through the San Marino National Committee for UNICEF.

72. Most of all, 2000 also marked a new phase in the protection of the rights of the child, namely, the adoption by the Commission's two working groups of the twin draft Optional Protocols to the Convention. His Government believed that the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts already contained positive provisions that strengthened safeguards for children's rights, but, in the near future, it would be possible to impose a total ban on the recruitment into armed forces and the participation in armed conflicts of children under 18. San Marino intended to ratify the two instruments as soon as possible. His delegation also thanked the many NGOs which had made notable efforts to raise international public awareness of the rights of the child in the last few years and whose action had made possible the adoption in 1999 of ILO Convention (No. 182) concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which San Marino had since ratified.

73. The situation of children throughout the world was a topic of growing concern which had assumed truly dramatic proportions in areas badly affected by poverty, where thousands of children died every day as a result of preventable illnesses or became infected with HIV. In developed countries, unemployment, violence, crime and drug addiction among children and young people were the most serious problems. There was still an enormous amount of work to be done to ensure the physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development of every child, in line with article 27 of the Convention. The international community needed to set about that task immediately and take urgent and effective measures to protect the environment so that future generations could enjoy the planet's resources.

74. Ms. GORGIEVA (Observer for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, because appalling violations of the most elementary rights of children were related to extreme poverty, the international community should make the elimination of poverty a priority. It was to be hoped that, at the special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the World Summit on Social Development, proper attention would be paid to promoting measures to counteract extreme poverty and its negative effects on children. The forced recruitment of children into armed forces was another very serious violation of their rights and her Government unreservedly endorsed the adoption of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. It also welcomed the completion of the work on the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

75. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had spared no effort to alleviate the sufferings of children traumatized by the war in Kosovo. To that end, it had provided all refugee children with humanitarian assistance and free medical services and education. At the national level, her Government had endeavoured to take more effective measures to ensure the enforcement of the child protection standards contained in international instruments and domestic law. Believing that only an independent body could monitor such matters, the Government had taken the initiative of establishing an ombudsman for children, the only post of its kind in the region and something of a rarity in Europe as a whole. The ombudsman had drawn up a plan of action for children which was currently being implemented. A brochure outlining the role of the ombudsman had been widely distributed during his tour of various cities in Macedonia.

76. Furthermore, in accordance with its commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which it was a signatory, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had submitted a report on its implementation of the Convention to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and a constructive dialogue had ensued. The recommendations formulated by the Committee following its consideration of the report had been carefully studied. The Government recognized the need to coordinate its various activities relating to children and, in the near future, it intended to establish a National Committee on the Rights of the Child to prepare a national long-term strategy for the promotion of children's rights and for the follow-up to the implementation of the Convention. To that end, her Government would work with UNICEF and other international organizations involved in protecting children's rights.

77. Mr. BAKRADZE (Observer for Georgia) said that Georgia had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in April 1994 and had incorporated the provisions thereof into its domestic legislation. The rights of children as enshrined in the Convention, especially

the right to education, health care and personal development, were the fundamental principles that underpinned Georgian legislation designed to protect children's interests. Regrettably, however, the effective implementation of those laws had been hampered by a number of external factors, the most significant being the violation of Georgia's territorial integrity by Abkhaz separatists, as a result of which more than 200,000 ethnic Georgians, including 60,000 children, had been expelled from their homes. The conflict in Abkhazia had had very unfortunate consequences as far as the implementation of the rights of the child was concerned. The Abkhaz separatists had burned down nearly all the Georgian schools or turned them into markets with the intention of eradicating the use of the Georgian language in the region. Local children had been deprived of access to basic health care and forced to work in citrus plantations.

78. The situation of children who had been internally displaced by the conflict and were living in Government-controlled areas was scarcely better in view of the serious economic and financial problems besetting the country and hundreds of children had become waifs and beggars. It was therefore vitally important that the international community should continue to provide humanitarian assistance. The Georgian Government wished to thank the donor countries, government organizations and NGOs which had assisted those children. It expected great things from the implementation of the Plan of Action for 2001-2005, which was being jointly elaborated with UNICEF.

79. Ms. NAIKER (Observer for South Africa) said that the damaging legacy of apartheid would take a long time to be eradicated completely and that the underdevelopment which permeated the entire political, economic and social structure of South African society was affecting the growth, development and social welfare of children. The Constitution enshrined the principles contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which South Africa had ratified in 1994, notably the principle of the best interests of the child. The Government was determined to promote and protect the human rights recognized in the Constitution and it therefore had developed a National Programme of Action for Children which mainstreamed children's issues into the work of all Government departments. The Programme was being coordinated by the Minister in the President's Office and the Office on the Status of Children. The Government had also embarked on a national campaign to mobilize the necessary resources to raise public awareness of the problem of HIV/AIDS, which affected women and children in particular, and to find alternative care for orphans whose parents had died of AIDS. The campaign against the HIV/AIDS pandemic called for a holistic approach and close partnership between all the relevant partners. Moreover, South Africa was the venue for the XIII International AIDS Conference due to be held in July 2000.

80. Pursuant to its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, South Africa had submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and would endeavour to implement the various recommendations made by the Committee following its consideration of the report. South Africa had also ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which was an important regional instrument concerning children. The Charter had already entered into force and the Government intended to ensure that it was duly implemented.

81. South Africa condemned the use of children in armed conflicts and therefore welcomed the adoption by consensus of the relevant Optional Protocol to the Rights of the Child. It regretted, however, that the Working Group entrusted with drafting the Optional Protocol had

been unable to reach agreement on making 18 the minimum age for the military recruitment of children. Lastly, urgent steps needed to be taken both nationally and internationally to tackle the sexual exploitation and trafficking of children. Consequently, South Africa also welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

82. Mr. STAHLHOFER (World Health Organization) said that there was an intrinsic relationship between health and human rights, which explained why the World Health Organization (WHO) had adopted a comprehensive strategy that placed strong emphasis on human rights and the right to development. An essential element of the strategy was the organization's commitment to place the rights of the child at the centre of its work.

83. In recent years, WHO had drawn the attention of the Commission to the alarming situation of young children, whose rights and needs were all too often neglected. Every year, more than 1 million adolescents died as a result of accidents, suicide, violence, pregnancy-related complications and illnesses that were either preventable or curable. The international community, and especially actors in the field of human rights, should pay close attention to the problem. Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child applied to girls and boys in equal measure, emphasis was often placed - and rightly so - on violations of the rights of girls. WHO wished to remind the Commission that the specific vulnerabilities of boys needed to be recognized as well.

84. Adolescent boys were generally perceived to be healthy, but such a view was inaccurate. Boys were socialized to be independent and they were consequently reluctant to seek social and emotional help. Their health and development were impaired as a result. Road traffic accidents in many countries and homicide in the Americas and certain countries in transition were the principal causes of death among young males. Worldwide, there were more suicides among boys than girls. Boys also formed the majority of homeless street children, who were exposed to various dangers such as exploitation, violence, abuse, HIV infection and risk-taking behaviour such as tobacco use and intravenous drug injection. Furthermore, while the sexual and reproductive health rights of girls were now increasingly recognized, similar attention had not been paid to the rights of boys, a situation which had repercussions for the health of both sexes. The fact that one in four persons infected with HIV was a young male under 25 highlighted the urgent need for preventive measures to be taken during adolescence.

85. The failure to address the health and development of adolescents was a denial of human rights as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights instruments. The Convention referred to the role of families in guiding and supporting adolescents, a task in which they should be assisted by the State. The views of young people on matters that concerned them also needed to be taken into account. WHO's work with adolescents was underpinned by those principles.

86. WHO urged member States to pay close attention to the health of adolescents and young children as part of their reporting obligations under the Convention and other relevant human rights instruments. Governments needed to collate information disaggregated by sex and age, thereby enabling them to identify and respond more effectively to the particular problems of specific groups. States should take whatever measures were necessary to implement the

Convention in full and should avail themselves of the technical expertise of WHO in that regard. They should also realize that their efforts needed to go beyond the health sector. Strategies should be formulated to ensure that adolescents had access to appropriate information, counselling and health services that were responsive to their needs, especially with regard to their reproductive and sexual health needs and the protection of their right to privacy. Lastly, it was necessary to ensure full participation by adolescents in the identification of their needs and to take account of the differing requirements of boys and girls.

87. Mr. MARTINS (Observer for Angola) said that the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the General Assembly and of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) demonstrated the importance which the international community attached to protecting children's rights. Many countries had also adopted national laws which enshrined and protected the rights of the child. Thus, in Angola, as well as a youth court, there was a special court for hearing child-related cases and the Family Code, which dealt with questions such as adoption, guardianship of minors, exercise of paternal authority and proof of paternity or maternity, aimed to address a range of issues concerning children.

88. However, children's rights were not always protected during conflicts. Children caught up in such conflicts were deprived of education and left homeless. Orphaned, they lived in the streets where they were prey to all manner of vices such as prostitution, pornography, drug addiction and delinquency. They frequently became the victims of traffickers. Those problems had already been addressed in various resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights and it was essential that all States should implement and abide by them. The Commission should adopt a further resolution on the impact of armed conflicts on children.

89. Mr. Ibrahim (Sudan) took the Chair.

90. Mr. ACEMAH (Observer for Uganda) said that a number of significant developments had taken place since the publication of the report of the Secretary-General on the abduction of children from northern Uganda (E/CN.4/2000/69). On 28 January 2000, a total of 21 Ugandans, including a group of abducted children, had been released from captivity in the Sudan pursuant to a bilateral agreement signed by the Presidents of Uganda and the Sudan in Nairobi (Kenya) on 8 December 1999. On 6 April 2000, a second batch comprising 51 people had been released. During their return journey, the captives had been accompanied by senior officials of the Sudanese Government and officers from the Sudanese army. The Government and people of Uganda appreciated the Sudanese gesture and urged the Government of the Sudan to continue to demonstrate its commitment to the Nairobi Agreement. His Government also thanked the Commission for its assistance in efforts to secure the immediate and unconditional release of all abducted children and the Carter Center for its role in brokering the Nairobi Agreement, to which the Ugandan Government was firmly committed. However, a number of abducted children were still being held in intolerable conditions in the Sudan and the Commission should therefore continue to exert pressure to ensure their early release and safe return to Uganda. His delegation intended to introduce a relevant draft resolution.

91. The Ugandan Government noted that the aforementioned report of the Secretary-General had failed to take account of the request made by the Commission in paragraph 12 of its

resolution 1999/43, namely, that the Secretary-General should report on the implementation of the said resolution to the Commission at its fifty-sixth session. The report was unacceptable and fell far short of the standards to be expected of United Nations documents. His delegation hoped that the Secretary-General would send a mission to the affected regions in the near future in order to assess the implementation of the Commission's resolution. The full implementation of the resolution was crucial to securing the immediate and unconditional release of all abducted Ugandan children.

92. Ms. CASSAM (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that more than 120,000 children aged under 16 were involved in armed conflicts in Africa. They not only endured the hardships of military life, but also suffered from malnutrition, malaria and sexually transmitted diseases; for the most part, they were also illiterate. The problem of child soldiers, like that of the increasing number of out-of-school children, was a matter of grave concern and it was therefore essential to launch an urgent programme of demobilization, adjustment and rehabilitation into the social and economic fabric of the countries concerned. A number of African countries had already requested the assistance of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in formulating an appropriate strategy and implementing an approach along such lines.

93. Demobilization was the most delicate, but also the most rapid phase of the process if all the conditions were right, i.e. if there was a genuine and clearly expressed political will and firm commitment on the part of belligerents and exploiters of children. On the other hand, adjustment and integration were the phases that consumed the most time and resources. While it was easy to send demobilized children to traditional schools, such a solution was the least suitable because it failed to recognize that such children had been forced to grow up quickly, that many had enrolled in the army to escape poverty and that traditional school programmes were frequently divorced from real life and were not based on active and participative teaching methods. Accordingly, UNESCO had developed an express-training strategy for demobilized child soldiers aimed at rehabilitating them and reintegrating them into society. It involved placing the child for five or six months in a youth centre where he would receive rudimentary practical training and then sending him to a model farm or skills centre where he would be given vocational training with a view to integrating him into a village community, preferably in a rural area, where he would work alongside other villagers.

94. A quick and definitive solution to the problem of child soldiers was one of the preconditions of peace and sustainable development, but it required substantial resources and hence genuine cooperation between the various interested partners. UNESCO stood ready to participate in such an undertaking and share its experience with all its partners and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, whose outstanding efforts on behalf of child soldiers should be commended.

95. Mr. AL-JASSAM (Observer for Kuwait) said that respect for the rights of the child was the basis for the establishment of a healthy society in which everyone could exercise his or her rights freely and fully. Kuwait was aware of the need to make the rights of the child a reality; it had been one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and prioritize the protection of their rights.

96. A number of measures had been taken to protect the health and promote the development of Kuwaiti children. The country boasted a variety of medical and educational establishments where specialized personnel catered for the needs of all kinds of children, particularly disabled children and children with learning difficulties. The Social Centre for Women and Children supervised children's homes and recreation centres to which all children enjoyed free access. The National Commission for Education, Science and Culture also provided direct or indirect services to mothers and children. Training centres boasting all manner of modern equipment were designed to develop children's potential.

97. Children were the country's future; it was therefore essential to prepare a decent life for them in society and to bring them up in a spirit of peace, tolerance, freedom and human fellowship.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.